

ROBERT BRENT—REPRESENTATIVES OF.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 696.]

MAY 4, 1860.

Mr. OLIN, from the Committee on Military Affairs, made the following

REPORT.

*The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the memorial of Harriet Brent, widow, and Sarah H. Brent, Ellen Brent, and Caroline Brent, daughters of Robert Y. Brent, now deceased, who was surviving executor of Robert Brent, paymaster, and paymaster general of the army, report :*

That in the settlement of the accounts of the late Robert Brent, as paymaster and paymaster general of the army, from the year 1808, to 1829, of great disbursements amounting to \$40,386,967 55, a balance of \$20,004 94 principal, with interest thereon, is claimed as due from his estate to the United States, for which proceedings were instituted in the courts of the United States, many years ago, and are still undetermined.

And the memorialists pray that these proceedings may be discontinued in consideration of the just and equitable claims, which they pray Congress to allow as set-off, of the said estate against the United States, on the following grounds, to wit :

That, between the years 1808 and 1816, the office of said Robert Brent was changed into that of paymaster general, and a large addition made to the army, by reason of the war with Great Britain, whereby greatly increased duties and responsibilities were imposed upon him without any corresponding increase of compensation, not only in the payment of the regular army, but in the disbursements of great sums in the payment of the militia and volunteers. In addition to which was imposed on him the paying the half-pay pensioners, from all which his successors, though receiving much larger compensation, have been exempted.

That for those extra labors, responsibilities, risks, and the losses that attend such disbursements, he ought to be allowed by Congress, according to the principle which the courts have declared just, and which Congress has repeatedly sanctioned, a reasonable extra allowance or percentage on the amount, at least, of his extra disbursements for the militia, volunteers, and half-pay pensioners, amounting

to \$3,041,994 02 ; for which extra compensation reference is made to the following cases :

1. That of Satterlee Clark, Pamphlet Laws, 1848 and 1849, p. 136, and to act approved March 3, 1849, and report No. 727, H. R., 30th Congress, 1st session.

2. That of Governor Tompkins, Senate doc., 29th Congress, 2d session, No. 114, pages 7, 9, and 13, and Pamphlet Laws of the United States, 1847, p. 24, and act approved February 22, 1847.

3. That of Ex-President Monroe, 20th Congress, 2d session, doc. No. 26 ; H. R., Ex. Doc., 20th Congress, 2d session, No. 76 ; reports of committee, 20th Congress, 2d session, No. 96, and 21st Congress, No. 276.

4. For allowance of interest, to the case of heirs of Colonel Charles Simms, Rep. No. 12, 34th Congress, 1st session, and bill, H. R. No. 207.

That the said Robert Brent had great difficulties, and some inevitable losses in keeping his accounts with the banks, dispersed all over the Union at that period, from many of which, to this day, no account has ever been received, and many of which have long since become insolvent. That at a period of great difficulty in the financial affairs of the country, towards the close of the war of 1812, and of great public necessity, in order to send the army under General Jackson to the defence of New Orleans, the said Robert Brent, with Colonel Monroe, then Secretary of War, raised a large sum of money from the banks, thereby pledging his whole private fortune to accomplish a great public service. That in addition to the official duty and responsibility in paying the regular army, that of endorsing and paying over large sums of treasury notes was imposed upon the said Robert Brent, with heavy risks and much additional labor, for which extra labor and risk, added to the disbursements on account of militia, volunteers, and half-pay pensioners, he never received any extra compensation.

That if the proceedings in equity alluded to, which are still pending, should proceed to a final decree, the small remnant of property left by Robert Y. Brent, surviving executor and son of said Robert Brent, by the effect of the priority claimed by the United States in such cases, will be completely absorbed, and the claims of his private creditors defeated, and the memorialists, assignees of the majority of the heirs-at-law of said Robert Brent, will be left penniless.

That the great-grandfather of the daughters of said Robert Y. Brent was one of the original proprietors of the city of Washington, and surrendered gratuitously one-half of his farm to the government for the seat of the federal metropolis, in the delusive expectation that he would find compensation for what he had surrendered in the improved value of city lots, into which the balance was converted. But that the fallacy of those hopes is matter of public notoriety, for the government having put the lots it held into the market at once, at low rates, the taxation which ensued enforced the sale of those held by the original proprietors at a ruinous sacrifice, and the result was the almost total loss of the whole property.

The committee being satisfied that the considerations thus stated are sufficient to establish an equitable case for the favorable action of

Congress, and that no appropriation from the treasury is called for, are of opinion that the proper accounting officers of the treasury should be directed to adjust, upon equitable principles, the accounts of the said Robert Brent, and that whatever balance may be due to his estate should be set off against the suits now pending by the United States in the District of Columbia.

They report the accompanying bill as embodying the views of the committee, and recommend its passage.

